

BACK BAY ARCHITECTURAL DISTRICT

Business Sector Guidelines

GUIDELINES FOR EXTERIOR DESIGN

BUSINESS SECTOR: NEWBURY STREET, BOYLSTON STREET, AND MASSACHUSETTS AVENUE [and the commercially zoned segments of the district's alphabetical cross streets]

The Back Bay Residential District, established under Chapter 625, Acts of 1966, was enlarged by Chapter 463, Acts of 1974 (effective August 3, 1974) to include Newbury and Boylston Streets from Dartmouth Street to Massachusetts Avenue, with the intervening connecting streets, and its name was changed to [the] Back Bay Architectural District. [The district's boundaries were subsequently expanded, under Ch. 645 of the Acts of 1979 to include Newbury and Boylston Streets from Dartmouth Street to Arlington Street (again with the intervening connecting streets). The commission's jurisdiction was further expanded to include the district's alley elevations under Ch. 624 of the Acts of 1981.]

All plans for demolition or new construction or for exterior alteration or repair of existing buildings, as well as all proposals concerning the erection of signs, awnings and other features appurtenant to structures in the Architectural District, must be submitted to the Back Bay Architectural Commission for review and approval.

These guidelines, a supplement to those for the Back Bay Residential District, apply to the special needs of businesses for changes to existing structures in the business zone—Newbury Street, Boylston Street, and Massachusetts Avenue [and the commercially zoned segments of the district's cross streets]. They are intended to clarify the criteria which will guide the Back Bay Architectural Commission it is required by the above-cited laws to make. The Commission will consider such issues as: the architectural and historical significance of the buildings; the mass, height, scale, fenestration, and color of buildings and blocks of buildings; the treatment of yards and entranceways; and the size, location and color of signs.

All changes must conform to zoning code, sign code, and building code regulations. Approvals granted by the Commission do not constitute approval of any required variances to the zoning code or other regulations. [As a matter of Environment Department policy, the commission will act on an application only after the Board of Appeal issues a variance. Thus, if any increase in square footage, height or enclosed space (including garages) is proposed, or if any change in legal use or occupancy is required, applicants must first seek zoning clearances from the Inspectional Services Department and, if necessary, from the Board of Appeal.—Application for Certificate of Appropriateness, "Zoning Considerations"]

BUILDINGS

Façade Changes

Not generally allowed except as specified in these guidelines. The covering or removal of original façade elements (columns, pilasters, fenestration, arches, lintels, decorative elements) is generally discouraged except as discussed elsewhere in these guidelines.

Extensions into Front and Side Yards

Not generally allowed.

Demolition

Newbury Street. Not generally allowed.

Boylston Street: Allowed only if it is clearly demonstrated that any replacement is justifiable architecturally and economically as well as in its urban design impact on the street. (The objective is to prevent the appearance of open lots within the District.) Demolition when approved will generally be allowed only after all permits for the replacement structure(s) have been obtained and satisfactory assurance has been given that new construction will follow immediately.

Street Numbers

Required at entrance for each building address. Numbers should be easily visible and legible from the street both day and night. A vertical typeface without attached background is encouraged.

Entrances: first-floor conversions to shops

Boylston Street: Not applicable.

Massachusetts Avenue: allowed according to Newbury Street guidelines.

Newbury Street: Access to a first-floor shop should be from the original building entrance lobby. New separate exterior entrances will generally be discouraged. Access to a basement shop may be from a depressed yard. See “Yard Depressions.”

Masonry: painting and cleaning

It is the intent of these guidelines that the original colors used in the District be restored unless it can be demonstrated that an original color was incompatible with the others in the vicinity at the time of construction. The painting of previously unpainted brick and stone masonry is encouraged. The removal of accumulated dirt and paint with non-damaging methods is encouraged. Sandblasting is not acceptable as a cleaning technique. All color changes require the approval of the Commission. **(For further guidelines on the care of masonry, see Back Bay Architectural Commission: Guidelines for the Residential District.)**

Painting: doors, windows and trim

All changes in color should conform to the Commission’s guidelines (see Appendix). Existing doors, windows and trim may be repainted in existing colors. In a case of an incompatible existing color or shade, however, a change to one within the guidelines is strongly recommended. New metal frames and other components should be pre-finished in a dark color approximating the approved trim color used elsewhere on the building. Finishes should be matte or semi-gloss.

Marquees

May be retained where existing. Compatible marquees will be approved only for new buildings or certain renovations where their utility to the public’s use of the building can be demonstrated.

Shop Windows: basement and first-floor conversions of dwellings to shops

Boylston Street: Not applicable.

Massachusetts Avenue: Allowed according to Newbury Street guidelines.

Newbury Street: It is intended that the original rhythm of bays, entrances, fenestration, and decorative elements be retained.

Flat façade: The first floor windows may be increased in height. Basement windows may be enlarged, but they should align with, and in no case exceed the size of the first-floor windows. Basement walls should be masonry to match existing stonework as closely as possible. Glass should be mounted in the plane of the original glass.

Projecting masonry bays: A projecting bay used for display of merchandise may be replaced on the first-floor and/or basement levels by a predominantly glass bay subject to the following conditions: The plan of the new bay must conform to the plan of the original bay as closely as possible; supporting columns replacing existing masonry should be of a large enough cross section to appear visually to support the masonry above.

Existing storefronts

Remodeling of existing storefronts is allowed provided that: the remodeling is compatible with the overall architectural character of the building; existing major architectural features are given recognition; the existing architectural detailing within the storefront area is retained as much as possible. In such remodelings, good contemporary commercial is encouraged.

YARDS

Fences

Existing compatible fences and stone curbing around planted areas should be retained. Where these are missing and new fences are needed, fences should be durable so as to be able to withstand normal abuse. Fences should be largely transparent, with dimensions and spacing of posts and rails similar to those of original fences typical elsewhere in the District. In all cases, the design should be compatible with the nature of the materials selected. Among the types of fence which are generally not appropriate are: concrete block, chain link, and most wood. Color should be of a dark value, such as black or a darker version of approved trim color. Light colors are discouraged.

Lighting

Inconspicuous low-height lighting of planting and paved areas is recommended, particularly where it will contribute to the safety of residents and visitors. All lighting should be from concealed sources. Within a block, general flood lighting of a small-scale building is usually not allowable.

Paving

For walkways and other pedestrian-use areas, the Commission encourages the use of paving materials and patterns characteristic of the period when the structure on the property was constructed. For most lots, red brick pavers are recommended, but smooth dressed stone and rough surfaced tile pavers may also be appropriate. Materials that are discouraged include: blacktop paving, light-colored square concrete pavers, gravel, outdoor carpeting, and artificial grass.

Planting

In the residential sections of the District, as much planting as possible should be preserved and maintained. Grass and a wide variety of trees, ornamental trees, flowering shrubs, ground covers and flowering plants are appropriate and recommended plant materials. Light-colored gravel, wood chips or marble chips in planted areas are discouraged. For paved areas, boxes of plant materials are recommended as borders, particularly along the street lot lines on Newbury Street.

Yard Depressions

Boylston Street: Not generally allowed.

Massachusetts Avenue: Not generally allowed.

Newbury Street: allowed subject to the following provisions: In reviewing proposals for depressed yard areas as entrances to lower-level shops, the Commission will take into consideration the size of the lot and the overall appearance of the block. In blocks with few depressed yards, a minimum amount of excavation is generally preferred. Access to the depressed area should be from the original entrance walkway, wherever possible, in order to maintain the rhythm of walkways and yards. Planting and/or fencing should be maintained along the entire street frontage of the depressed area, and landscaping is encouraged. Retaining walls should be masonry compatible in color with the existing building masonry. Excavations for basement conversions are discouraged between Hereford Street and Massachusetts Avenue.

Entrance Lighting

Building entrances should be attractively lighted. Concealed-source down-lighting is recommended.

Fire Escapes

While appropriately designed fire balconies may be approved in certain cases, diagonal-stair-type fire escapes are generally not allowed.

Appendix I

APPROPRIATE COLORS

Color samples should be submitted to the Commission staff for approval before work is begun. Generally, the Commission prefers that, in repainting, the original colors be used when such information exists.

Doors: Original “old” doors should be restored to deep-toned wood finishes but black and muted browns, greens, greys and ochre paint colors may be acceptable alternatives.

Walls and Front Steps: Repainting should maintain the general color of the natural masonry and must not be completed in bright or unusual colors.

Marquees: Anodized bronze, black or dark-colored metal.

Window Frames and Sash: Black, medium greys, grey-browns, and deep reds are most appropriate for wooden window frames in brownstone or brownstone-trimmed buildings, while deep shades of grey, brown, and green as well as black should be used with red brick. Window frames within light-colored stone construction may be painted beige, dove grey, deep blue, forest green, or black.

Oriels: Subdued colors like soft browns, bronze greens, medium greys, and black.

Storm Windows: Should closely match trim color.

Shutters (where appropriate): Black or other dark color.

Iron Work (fences, handrails, balconies, fire escapes): Black or other dark color

Cornices: Painted the color of the original masonry or masonry trim

Dormer Windows: To match existing windows

Gutters and Downspouts: Copper on primary elevations; bronze-anodized or black may be allowed on secondary elevations

Utility Equipment: Dark or grey color.

Appendix II

BACK BAY ARCHITECTURAL DISTRICT: REVISIONS TO SIGN GUIDELINES

The following is an update of current BBAC policy regarding signage in the commercial areas of the architectural district. Provisions of the 1977 sign guidelines which are not affected herein remain in effect. All signage is reviewed on a case-by-case basis: in its design review the Commission considers the design of the sign itself, its effect on architectural details, its method of attachment to the building, and its effect on neighboring buildings. Boston Sign Code regulations pertaining to allowable area for signage on a building front will be observed. Signage approvals pertain to a particular applicant and are not transferable: signs must be removed or resubmitted for approval when the operation or purpose of the business changes.

- 1) **FREESTANDING SIGNS:** strongly discouraged; temporary sandwich board-type signs are not allowed. Freestanding showcases or kiosks are not allowed; reuse of existing kiosks is strongly discouraged.
- 2) **SIGNS ON SIDEWALK RAILINGS:** may be allowed if located below the top of the railing
- 3) **APPLIED SIGNS:** may be allowed when design of façade is compatible and signage will not obscure architectural details. Signs or plaques located next to or above entryways are strongly discouraged. Building directories are not appropriate to building exteriors: they belong inside the entry vestibule.
- 4) **SIGNAGE IN BUILDING ENTRIES:** not appropriate (except for building numbers)
- 5) **PROJECTING SIGNS:** may be allowed when design of façade is not compatible with an applied sign. Should be suspended from metal brackets, not attached directly to the building.
- 6) **AWNINGS (with or without signage):** most appropriate for first floor only, discouraged for basement and upper floor levels. Canopies for building entries are discouraged.
- 7) **BANNERS AND FLAGS:** strongly discouraged. Reuse of existing flagpoles may be allowed.
- 8) **ILLUMINATION:** neon (both exterior and interior window) signs and lighting are generally inappropriate and not allowed. Illuminated box signs are not allowed. Lighting for signs may be considered on a case-by-case basis; conduit may not be exposed. Back lighting for awnings may be allowed provided only lettering is illuminated.
- 9) **GRAPHICS:** appropriateness of corporate logos will be determined on a case-by-case basis. Expression of the name of the business only is appropriate: goods, services, individual names and telephone numbers are strongly discouraged.
- 10) **INTERIOR WINDOW SIGNS:** lettering applied to window glass or signs hung directly behind the glass are to be reviewed. Window signage is encouraged in many cases.
- 11) **TEMPORARY SIGNS:** may be installed in windows only for up to 60 days pending submission and approval of permanent signage. Banners strung across the building are not appropriate.

Adopted June 1987